

A PERFIN GLOSSARY

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This is not going to be exhaustive (and boring [I hope!]): just some terms that might confuse new members. Many of these discoveries were only made in the last 10 years so should be familiar to most members but for the newer members

What Is A Perfin?

In 1868 the British Post Office agreed not to exchange for cash at Post Office counters stamps that had been perforated with initials, names or trade marks, coats of arms and other devices. Foreign Post Offices followed suit. This was to prevent the theft of stamps by clerks and post boys. Stamps or postal stationery so perforated is a perfin and those on GB postage stamps are catalogued by the GB Perfin Society.

Fiscal and revenue stamps were often CANCELLED on the document by a perforator that may have included initials and dates: these are not perfins but cancellations. That is not to say you shouldn't collect them. Between about 1950 and 1960 the envelopes containing films sent to some processors were perforated to identify them. Sometimes these perforated numbers and letters fell on the stamp: these are not perfins: once seen they are easily identified.

A mint perfin stamp is postally valid and has NOT been cancelled by the perfin.

Sloper - Perfin Machines - Competitors

In 1858 Joseph Sloper of London patented his invention of perforating bills or cheques with the words "CANCELLED" or "PAID" to prevent them being presented for payment a second time. Sometimes initials and dates were added.

In 1868 he got permission to perforate initials on stamps to prevent them being stolen by clerks or post boys (see "What Is A Perfin") Joseph died in 1890, his sons carried on the business and it continued as a private company until 1991 when it was sold to Checkpoint Sloper who continued to perfin stamps until recently. We are trying to discover who produces the few perfins that are still in use. Most firms now use franking machines.

Sloper would either perfin stamps for you or sell you a machine so you could do it yourself. For big users Sloper would use a **MULTI DIE** often 12 dies wide (10 after decimalization in 1971). Sloper used motorised machines. Sloper would also supply you with a hand operated multidie machine for your own use, the biggest was probably 2x3 dies. Because of the way they were made there may be minor differences in multidies. Although some early perfin collectors saw Slopers Works and records before and during World War II, we were denied access until 1991 when we were given some old records and machines.

In the late 1800's Sloper became a sub postmaster so he could get a discount on the stamps he perfined. Other sub postmasters also perfined stamps. The discount ended in the early 1900's so most sub postmasters gave up perfins although the last, Sydney Allchin, near neighbours of Slopers in Hampstead, continued until bought out by Slopers in the 1930's. Waterlow Brothers, stamp and bank note printers appear to have perfined

stamps from about 1900. Gradually it seems that the work was handed to Slopers again in the 1930's although it may have still gone through Waterlows. Another firm who supplied perfin machines was Baddely Bros, but we do not believe they made the machines themselves.

From about 1930 Sloper standardised on a distinctive alphabet of small letters. Larger examples are often seen on other Sloper products such as title pages of library books i.e. "PROPERTY OF SO & SO LIBRARY".

"SPG"/Waterlow Type Dies

When Roy Gault, our Catalogue Editor, was working on the "S" pages of the New Illustrated Catalogue (the "Gault Catalogue") he noted that there were many dies for the perfin "SPG" used by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (in Foreign Parts). Early dies (c1900) used large letters, later, medium sized and finally (c1910-1930), small letters. All the letters were crudely formed and distinctive and sometimes appeared in different combinations of letter size. The same letters appeared in perfins of other users.

Roy came to the conclusion that these perfins were produced by clamping individual letter dies together rather like type in printing. For a subsequent order of perfins this might be done using letters in a different combination. It was subsequently discovered that Waterlow Brothers offered such a service for perfins of up to 3 letters (or 2 letters and an ampersand). Such dies are noted in the Gault Catalogue and given the suffix 'v' to show that the letter arrangement and spacing varies.

Also see "provisional" but there is a small class of 'variable' perfins obviously Slopers later alphabet but produced well after W.W.II. Why and how these were produced we do not know.

Partials, Inverted Dies etc

Sloper was usually careful about the perfins he produced but the users of private machines were not so careful. The work of perfuming for the latter was given to some office boy who might fold a sheet of stamps to speed the work, so producing inverted or reversed perfins on some stamps. He might have produced perfins with impressions overlapping 2 stamps, double strikes or partials. These are of no significance whatsoever as regards price and dealers should be made aware of this. Incomplete impressions, double strikes and partials are defective perfins just like a torn stamp. Inverted or reversed complete perfins are perfectly collectable at a normal price.

Note:- on the whole, perfins were used on commercial mail and will have "commercial" (often heavy) cancellations. You may look a long time for "fine used"!

The following 2 items are taken from Roy Gault's introduction to the Tomkins Catalogue.

Provisionals

Sloper's offices were damaged by enemy action in 1941 and many of their dies must have been destroyed. Sloper continued to perfin stamps using emergency arrangements, which involved perforating single letters or groups of letters in separate operations. This resulted in perfins with similar lettering but not spaced at a constant distance apart. Each variation is not listed individually but grouped together under a single catalogue number suffixed by the letter "p" to indicate it is a Wartime "Provisional". On occasions letters of different heights were used on the same stamp.

Coils

Before the invention of franking machines there were a number of machines which affixed stamps mechanically. These used coils (rolls) of stamps. Both horizontal and vertical delivery types were used. The "POKO" and "Michelius" machines were capable of perforating initials as well as affixing. A POKO perfin is quite distinctive with its seriffed alphabet. "FIXO" and "Multipost" machines were small and could not perfin initials but may have used pre-perfined coils. From watermark or arrangement of perfin it is apparent many perfins were supplied in coils and not necessarily used in affixing machines. It may be that perfins in coils were more convenient or secure.

Different Dies

Remember the Tomkins catalogue only lists the perfins whose users we know or suspect. This is about 1/3rd of known GB perfins. If you have a perfin, which is not listed in Tomkins it is probably in the New Illustrated Catalogue, which illustrates all known perfins. However, new dies (as opposed to new identities) are still being found.

The rules are, for a die to be different it must be ½mm different in dimensions (measuring from the centre of the top hole to the centre of the bottom hole) or have a different pin count (not counting obvious missing pins).

Comments would be welcome. I am trying to keep it simple but it is difficult to explain some of the terms in few words. Please write to ask for an explanation of any other "perfin terms" which are puzzling to you. Many other members could be having the same difficulty.